

HUNDLEY, VICTORIA R., M.A. Screwtape, Crowley, and their Predecessors: The Witty Demon as an Antimimetic Device (2019)
Directed by Dr. Christian Moraru. 35 pp.

Within the Western tradition of narratives focused on representing demons, few artists have strayed from the hellish stereotype to introduce comic ones. Still fewer have managed to create what I will call the witty demon, whose representation, I suggest, is one that simultaneously entertains and threatens its audience. The witty demon fits more comfortably in a comedy than a tragedy but is equally at home in both secular and religious narratives. In the narratives I will discuss, the character is also male, sophisticated, and well-composed, with a few strategic exceptions. Ultimately, the witty demon is an oxymoron that performs his role subversively. This interpretation of a demon is unusual when compared to both mimetic and antimimetic predecessors. The focus of this study centers around two twentieth-century novels, *The Screwtape Letters* and *Good Omens*, and their place within the tradition of the literary demon. As I will show, *The Screwtape Letters* subverts tradition by fostering witty demons that inspire self-reflection and laughter, whereas *Good Omens* provides evidence of naturalization of the witty demon and still maintains its status as an unnatural narrative.

HUNDLEY, VICTORIA R., M.A. Thomas Mann's Modern Monsters: The Gothic in *Death in Venice* and *The Black Swan*. (2019)
Directed by Dr. Anthony Cuda. 31 pp.

It is only within recent decades that critics have attempted an intentional study of the Gothic in modernist fiction, so perhaps it is not surprising that scholarship on Thomas Mann's use of the Gothic is not readily available. Examining the Gothic influence on traditional Romantic narratives in contrast to Thomas Mann's modern novellas shows how the Gothic adapts to support first Romantic and then modern aesthetics. Mary Shelley introduces the seminal Romantic Gothic monster in *Frankenstein*, and Stoker furthers the character type with his vampire in *Dracula*. Frankenstein's monster and Dracula are powerful and undeniable villains, at least within their respective narratives. It is, however, more difficult to name the villains in Mann's works, but features of the Gothic monster do surface throughout *Death in Venice* and *The Black Swan*, my foci in this essay. All three authors bring life to Gothic monsters by drawing attention to anatomic details such as predatory teeth, strong hands, unsettling eyes, odd skin color, as well as to cultural features like foreignness. Rather than collecting these traits in one monster, Mann breaks the Romantic Gothic monster into a set of aspects, which he then disperses among the modern characters and settings of *Death in Venice* and *The Black Swan*. In other words, Mann "fragments" the monsters from *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. In so doing, I will contend, the German writer demonstrates the compatibility between the Gothic and modernism.

SCREWTAPE, CROWLEY, AND THEIR PREDECESSORS:
THE WITTY DEMON AS AN ANTIMIMETIC DEVICE
AND
THOMAS MANN'S MODERN MONSTERS:
THE GOTHIC IN *DEATH IN VENICE*
AND *THE BLACK SWAN*

by

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SCREWTAPE, CROWLEY, AND THEIR PREDECESSORS: THE WITTY DEMON AS AN ANTIMIMETIC DEVICE

For it is the fate of every myth gradually to creep into the narrow defile of an alleged historical reality and to be treated by a later period as a unique fact with historical claims... transforming it with acuity and whimsy from a mythical dream into a historico-pragmatic history.

-Nietzsche 61

Within the Western tradition of narratives focused on representing demons, few artists have strayed from the hellish stereotype to introduce comic ones. Still fewer have managed to create what I will call the witty demon, whose representation, I suggest, is one that simultaneously entertains and threatens its audience. The witty demon fits more comfortably in a comedy than a tragedy but is equally at home in both secular and religious narratives. The character is arrogant, intelligent, amusing, successful, and manipulative. In the narratives discussed below, he is also male, sophisticated, and well-composed, with a few strategic exceptions. Ultimately, the witty demon is an oxymoron that performs his role subversively. This interpretation of a demon is unusual when compared to both mimetic and antimimetic predecessors. The most common demons are descendants of the beastly, horned figures that appeared in earnest during the Middle Ages. These monsters are usually part of mimetic narratives meant only to terrify but have also ironically been made ridiculous in cartoon form. More complex Christian narrative depictions of Satan, Hell, and demons are generally designed only to inspire

fear, never laughter.¹ The focus of this study centers around two twentieth-century novels, *The Screwtape Letters* and *Good Omens* and their place within the tradition of the literary demon. As I will show, *The Screwtape Letters* subverts tradition by fostering witty demons that inspire self-reflection and laughter, whereas *Good Omens* provides evidence of naturalization of the witty demon while still maintaining its status as an unnatural narrative.

Unnatural narratologists such as Jan Alber and Brian Richardson give the reader a way to consider and discuss his or her reactions to narratives that do not conform to tradition. According to a simplified version of Brian Richardson's definition of unnatural narratives, to be unnatural or antimimetic, a narrative must subvert a mimetic tradition that has come before it ("What is Unnatural Narratology" 34). Indeed, to be subversive, there must be something to subvert in the first place. Narratives outside the supernatural genre subvert real life, previous representations of real life, or both. However, because the supernatural is unseen and unknowable, narratives with supernatural settings can only subvert previous representations of the supernatural.² Artists who want to represent supernatural forces in an unnatural way must frustrate previous expectations formed by repeated, or naturalized, representations. An antimimetic device that is accepted as part of a narrative and repeated in other narratives eventually becomes the norm. When the

¹ This study is focused particularly on depictions of demons, but in many cases Satan, the Devil, and Hell are synonymous with narrative representations of demons. Additionally, I focus on narrative representations that leave plenty of room for authorial intent rather than relatively straightforward symbolic depictions, if such a thing exists.

² In the original preface to *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis asserts that "creatures higher in the natural order than ourselves, either incorporeal or animating bodies of a sort we cannot experience, must be represented symbolically if they are to be represented at all" (xxxiii).

device no longer contributes to the strangeness of the narrative, it is naturalized. The dark and monstrous representation of demons is the most naturalized, but humanized demons and comedic depictions are also familiar.

Demons have been depicted both mimetically and antimimetically for thousands of years. One artist will depart from a previous depiction of the demon, while another naturalizes it. At all points in the narrative history of demons, there is at least one unnatural representation of a demon that tells us something about its contemporary readers. The witty demon is a recent addition to the timeline of subversive literary demons.³ Goethe introduced the witty demon through Mephistopheles in his retelling of the Faust legend in 1808, but C.S. Lewis brings him fully to life by putting him in a comedy in 1942. Lewis makes his supernatural novel unnatural by creating a comedic story about a witty demon who is prepared to both entertain and advise his audience. This characterization is enough to create a noticeably new and unnatural narrative. Lewis's witty demon, Screwtape, was fully realized as an antimimetic device in *The Screwtape Letters* to urge readers to recognize and resist temptation. In 1990, Gaiman and Pratchett also employ a witty demon, but because Lewis has already successfully written the character into his narrative, *Good Omens* subverts the previous characterization to achieve the unnatural. *Good Omens* uses its own witty demon, Crowley, to undermine Screwtape and urge readers to recognize and resist the herd mentality of organized religion. However, Crowley does not work alone. We know the witty demon is, at the

³ Each to a different extent, this lineup of unusual demons includes: Medieval representations of demons, Dante's Satan, Milton's Satan, Goethe's Mephistopheles, Lewis's Screwtape, and Gaiman and Pratchett's Crowley. Though it is not the prime focus of this study, it is interesting to consider what this character tells us and future generations about readers in the late twentieth century.

very least, on its way to naturalization because in Gaiman and Pratchett's narrative he is not the only antimimetic device needed to make *Good Omens* unnatural.

These two narratives, published within fifty years of each other, provide an interesting study of narrative demonic depiction because their authors are known for their work in supernatural comedy, though they come from different religious backgrounds. By investigating the deviations from Lewis's witty demon to Gaiman and Pratchett's, within the context of well-known previous representations, we can see the process of naturalization taking place on a cultural level in the second half of the twentieth century and better understand the motivations behind the unnatural devices used by these three antimimetic authors. In his chapter on genre in *Unnatural Narratives*, and in his book *Impossible Storyworlds*, Jan Alber implies that an unnatural device can be naturalized for the individual as well as on a cultural level.⁴ A single reader becomes immune to certain unnatural devices simply by deciphering them once. It may only take one interaction to naturalize the unnatural because the next experience will not have the same disorienting effect if the reader has already naturalized it. For an entire culture, present and potentially future, to become immune, or to understand the "new" representation as the expectation or standard, a single encounter cannot possibly naturalize an antimimetic device.⁵ To naturalize an antimimetic device on a cultural level, other authors must reuse it. For

⁴ Alber discusses several examples of genres and storytelling devices that were once unnatural but are natural to us today. He also provides reading strategies that help the audience make sense of the unnatural. Alber and others have recognized the potential of these strategies to render the unnatural text natural to the individual reader.

⁵ Consider the image of God in the Western tradition. He is male, grandfatherly, with long white hair and a beard. It is only relatively recently that God's gender has been put into question and representations of God as a female are still unnatural to many readers. That God is personified as both a woman and a man in the Christian novel *The Shack* is evidence that the representations of a female God are becoming naturalized.

example, because supernatural elements have been incorporated into narratives for most of human history, we encounter such figures as angels and demons in fiction without feeling anything is out of place and without feeling like we need to make sense of what is happening. Citing *Beowulf* as an example of supernatural forces in early narratives, Alber suggests that culture gradually accepted the supernatural as natural within fiction (*Unnatural Narratives* 47). This means not all supernatural stories are unnatural, and even if a supernatural antimimetic author finds a way to make the novel unnatural, the narrative can gradually become natural.⁶ Because the supernatural does not have a knowable and tangible reality to subvert, the only way for the supernatural to be unnatural is to subvert its previously naturalized representations and religious texts.

To study representations of evil, the Bible is a useful starting point, as most of these depictions within the Western tradition originate from God's biblical adversaries. The way the Bible discusses evil and portrays demons leaves much room for interpretation, and various political leaders have used this fact to serve their purposes as needed. Artists who were part of the Early Church from the first to the sixth century used symbols, not just narratives, to share the Gospel. In the Preface to his book *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*, Jeffery Burton Russell observes that we do not know why there are so few representations of the Evil One in Christian art before the sixth century. I believe it is because communicating the Gospel to all nations had to be discreet and

⁶ I believe it is possible for this process to take place in reverse as well. A narrative can be natural to its contemporary readers, then become unnatural to future readers.

direct. There was no platform for the message to be shared through narrative art, so the stories of Jesus Christ were boiled down to symbols such as fish, bread, and wine.

By the Middle Ages, religious art was displayed and distributed in more overt and public methods. Artists had freedom to tell the story of spiritual warfare but needed to tell it without words, as much of the intended audience would have been illiterate. The result was a stark contrast between darkness and light so there could be no confusion between the right side and the wrong one. Demons were grotesquely evil and monstrous. Darren Oldridge uses a thirteenth century illustration by De Brailes Psalter to show how this darkness is made more impressive when shown in contrast to light. Angels wearing white are closer to Heaven “but as they fall, their bodies darken and their faces distort and acquire animal features” (*The Devil: A Very Short Introduction* 81-82). This depiction is representative of the scare tactics that defined religious artwork through the late Middle Ages.

Dante’s depiction of Satan in *The Divine Comedy* is a famous example of a monstrous, single-minded demon. Satan’s three heads each devour a famous traitor from human history. Dante’s Hell and his Satan became a conventional way of depicting the demonic. Though notable comic devils existed, medieval devils give us the stereotype of the horned, carnivorous, beastly Satan that is parodied today as cartoons and mascots.⁷ Russell includes a thirteenth-century image of the Devil from the “Codex Gigas” in his book *Satan*. He describes the picture as a stereotype: “Bestial horns and talons, his

⁷ Comic devils were especially common in English morality plays, but they lacked the level of intelligence that would define them as witty. John Cox describes scenes with these characters as “slapstick” (69).

leering eyes and grimacing mouth, and his livid face were generally thought to represent the most appropriate form a demon might assume.” Interestingly, Russell goes on to say the figure “appears comic” even though the original intention was to frighten the audience (223). That he can see what was once frightening in a comedic light is evidence of the naturalization of this particular demonic narrative.

From Lewis’s perspective, the associations between demons and bat-like creatures are directly linked to human preference. He says, “devils are depicted with bats’ wings and good angels with birds’ wings, not because anyone holds that moral deterioration would be likely to turn feathers into membrane, but because most men like birds better than bats” (xxxiii). However, it is difficult to determine which influence came first: human preference for birds and light or artistic representations linking demons with darkness and bats. Depictions are not reality, but they form reality for the audience. Depictions of the Hell have represented different realities based on different times. According to Oldridge, the Middle Ages also introduced the idea that the Devil could be an adversary of all humankind, not just God (30). This becomes very important to the history of artistic representations of Hell. If the Devil is the ultimate enemy, then anything or anyone associated with or compared to him is effectively ostracized and condemned. Convincing people that the enemy is aided by the Devil has caused humans to carry out horrific acts of violence in the name of Christianity and in the interest of ridding the world of evil. Consider as examples the Crusades, the Inquisition, and witch trials. Art or, more accurately, propaganda spreads the message of who or what should be considered evil quickly and efficiently.

By the Reformation, the protestants claimed the Devil was aiding the Catholics and vice versa. Oldridge explains that by the 1550s, this confused opposition “encouraged a huge proliferation of books and pamphlets with demonic themes—a process accelerated by the invention of printing in the middle years of the 15th century” (32). If religion in general, and demons specifically, were not already being used as propaganda, then the printing press made it certain. This period in history saw a greater number of fictional and allegorical written narratives about the skill of demons as intellectual tempters, as opposed to the visceral images of Satan from the Middle Ages. Words allowed a more complex and, in a way, more powerful version of Satan to emerge. Replacing images with words lets the imagination conjure whatever is most horrifying to the reader. Considering the serpent’s mission in the Garden of Eden, we can assume that the image of demons as tempters was not new, but the devils of the Reformation were more intelligent than the demons of the past. They knew how to play with the mind of their prey until the psychological battle was won. The story of Faust, which was popularized at this time, is a prime illustration of this internal struggle.

The medieval animalistic demon was firmly planted in the minds of the public, and artists during the Reformation had the option to subvert the then naturalized demon. Although belief in a literal Devil was declining, people who worried about landing in Hell after death still expected to encounter a carnivorous beast, not a rational being.⁸ Milton’s humanized Satan of *Paradise Lost* is a well-known example of this broken

⁸ Russell marks it “curious that this vividly powerful portrait of Satan should have appeared when belief in the Devil was rapidly declining among educated people” (*Mephistopheles* 97).

expectation. Russell claims *Paradise Lost* was such a compelling version of the traditional story of original sin that “it became the standard account for all succeeding generations” (*Mephistopheles* 95). This implies Milton’s Satan, arguably the hero of the epic, would have become a new standard as well. Since its publication, critics have continually produced mixed commentary on the ramifications of Milton’s Satan, but there is general agreement that we were meant to identify with this fallen angel. To Chad Stutz, this is controversial because, given that “Satan exemplifies a fragmented subjectivity we recognize, he is therefore somehow human; and because he appears to us as human, he therefore potentially invites our sympathy” (212). To Russell, Milton created a devil that was heroic but destructible (*Mephistopheles* 98). So even if we identify with him, it does not mean we should expect positive results from mimicking his actions. For its humanized Satan, *Paradise Lost* was treated as an unnatural narrative, but readers today have become so aware of its presence in the cannon of Western literature, that a relatable Satan is not unnatural on his own.⁹

Before Lewis wrote *The Screwtape Letters*, the witty demon had emerged with Goethe’s rewrite of Marlowe’s *Faust* in 1808. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment opened up the possibility that the Christian religion might not be as certain as was once thought. Writers and artists could no longer take for granted that their audiences would believe in the Devil, but that did not mean the Devil was not represented. When people started openly questioning God’s existence, it paved the way for artists to create a

⁹ There is controversy among critics on this point as well. Lewis believes Milton was a product of his time. Therefore, contemporary readers would not have been overly shocked by what other critics called heresies (*Preface to Paradise Lost* 91-92). Russell says “Milton made his mark on the subject not only by a departure from orthodoxy but by the poetic grandeur and detail that he added to it” (*Mephistopheles* 96).

narrative that included the witty demon. Readers would have been able to begin to accept a demon that was different than previous representations because they started entertaining the possibility that demons were not real. The Devil could now exist in an obviously non-allegorical work of fiction.¹⁰ Goethe capitalized on this to create one of the most memorable demons in literary history. That such works would still have had the desired effect on readers is evidence that representations of the demonic had formed their own reality, separate from a belief in a true Heaven or Hell.

Before unnatural narratologists gave readers a vocabulary to discuss the unnatural, critics discussed *Faust* using terms that point to its unnatural qualities, the characteristics that set this text apart from its predecessors. Russell says Goethe's *Faust* "resists summarization and reduction to formulas" (*Mephistopheles* 157). The critic describes Mephistopheles as too "ambiguous to be identified with the Christian Devil" (158). In Goethe's *Faust*, the Witch does not recognize Mephistopheles without his medieval costume of cloven feet, horns, tail, and claws. Mephistopheles tells her those days are past (144-145). The demon's witty phrasing calls attention to individuals who are slow to accept the changing times. Russell claims that his "suave" and "ironic" personality was extremely influential on writers after Goethe (158). Goethe introduces the idea of a demon that is witty, but he uses the character to hasten the growing disbelief in the literal Devil. Jumping ahead to the twentieth century and beyond, the Devil "is no longer an essential and pervasive concept" because belief became optional (Oldridge 44).

¹⁰ Russell frames Goethe's role in this cultural change nicely in *Mephistopheles* by noting "the theological shift from the Devil as a theological person to the Devil as a literary personage was permanently fixed by Goethe" (158-159).

Lewis, Gaiman, and Pratchett utilize Mephistopheles for his characteristics when belief in Heaven and Hell is generally neither expected nor condemned. With that idea comes a new wave of artistic representation of demons in the West. The medieval demon is the most reused depiction of Satan in the twentieth-century. Even though Hell is no longer a certainty, demons are still influential due to their prominent place in narrative representation. C.S. Lewis insists, in the original preface to *The Screwtape Letters* that belief in supernatural beings, “whether good or evil, does not mean a belief in either as they are represented in art and in literature” (xxxiii). This is the reason monstrous demonic traits were assigned to the enemies on both sides of the world wars through propaganda. The traits efficiently inspired dread and distrust.

For his witty Demon, Screwtape, Lewis borrows some parts of the medieval demon to instill a certain amount of anxiety in his readers but internalizes the hideous external features of the traditional demon. Lewis wanted his audience to fear the Evil One’s ability to tempt humanity while understanding that demons rarely look as threatening as one might expect. Although his preferred form is a well-composed man of business, Screwtape often writes casually to Wormwood about the desire to devour humans. And, once, when Screwtape loses his temper, the demon accidentally reverts to the form of a centipede (120).¹¹ Lewis’s narrative follows Screwtape, a high-ranking demon, as he counsels, through a series of letters, his demon-nephew, Wormwood, on the art of soul-acquisition. Only half a century later, *Good Omens*, co-authored by Neil

¹¹ At this point Lewis, via Screwtape, references Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as a misrepresentation demonic desire.

Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, complicates Lewis's *Screwtape* with the character of Crowley but does not stop there. True to its postmodern form, *Good Omens*—which simultaneously parodies the Christian apocalypse and the 1976 film *The Omen*—undermines and rewrites every representation of the supernatural it can. Although Gaiman and Pratchett claim they wrote the book because they wanted to entertain, each subversion of religion necessarily carries a message about religion from author to audience.¹² Regardless of the religious beliefs of the authors or readers, the history of demons in art collectively forms an image that can either be imitated or altered by any subsequent artist.¹³ Russell calls this the “history of concepts.” According to this way of thinking, “the Devil is the tradition of what he has been thought to be” (*Satan* 22). Subverting this tradition is what makes Lewis's *Screwtape* and Gaiman and Pratchett's Crowley unnatural.

Unnatural narrative theorists do not all agree on one set of qualifications that make a story unnatural or antimimetic. In the Introduction to *Unnatural Narratives*—*Unnatural Narratology*, Jan Alber and Rüdiger Heinze give an overview of influential definitions of the term unnatural as it relates to narrative theory. Viktor Shklovsky, David Halperin, Johannes Fehrle, and Caroline Pirlet broadly define the unnatural as “opposing

¹² Gaiman and Pratchett do not mind religion, only the potential it has to create the herd mentality, in which people seem not to think logically as they commit unkind acts in the name of their particular higher power. In the 2007 edition of *Good Omens*, Gaiman and Pratchett include a Foreword, an interview, and additional material in which they insist that they did not write the novel because they thought it would be incredibly influential. They just thought it was a funny idea, and they like to make people laugh.

¹³ Interestingly, *The Screwtape Letters* was written by a professed Christian and *Good Omens* was co-written by writers who are comfortable writing a parody of Christianity. For a closer look at Gaiman's religious background and beliefs, see Cyril Camus' “The ‘Outsider’: Neil Gaiman and the Old Testament.” *The Guardian* posted a video in 2009, during which Pratchett answers the question “Do you believe in God, or do you believe in the belief of Gods.”

the norms,” “making strange,” or simply “unconventional.” These conclusions are presented in contrast to more exclusive ones from Brian Richardson and Henrik Skov Nielson who “argue that unnatural narratives are anti-mimetic texts that move beyond the conventions of natural narratives” (3). In Richardson’s chapter of the same book, “What Is Unnatural Narrative Theory?” his definition includes the above description but adds that antimimetic narratives might also “contravene the practice of non-fictional narratives, usually in a flagrant manner, and they defy the conventions and expectations of existing, established genres” (34). For Richardson, using postmodern techniques is the most common way for authors to turn any mimetic supernatural text into an antimimetic.¹⁴

Starting from Richardson’s definition, it is easy enough to claim *Good Omens* as an unnatural narrative for its pop-culture references, genre mixtures, and a nearly non-existent narrative order. However, without these postmodern techniques to turn to, it is more difficult to pinpoint what makes *The Screwtape Letters* give off the scent of the unnatural.¹⁵ A broader definition such as the one presented in the Introduction to *Unnatural Narratives—Unnatural Narratology* says narratives are unnatural when they “rely on principles that have very little to do with the actual world around us” (Alber and Heinze 5). This would make *The Screwtape Letters* unnatural for its setting in Hell. But Hell is a commonly used setting, so this alone is not unnatural. Alber asserts “when we

¹⁴ This does not necessarily assume that all postmodern narratives are automatically unnatural. Instead, readers are much more likely to find antimimetic qualities in postmodern supernatural narratives.

¹⁵ Postmodern literary criticism is useful in unnatural narratology for its methodical study of unusual and subversive devices and themes. Ideas of how to confront the unnatural have been discussed at length in reference to postmodern narratives, but much of this can be applied to unnatural narratives from all eras.

read a fantastic text today, the impossible forces of the supernatural do not strike us as odd or strange; we can easily accept them as a part of the projected storyworld” (Alber 52).

The Screwtape Letters could be considered unnatural by Richardson because it problematizes its own ontological status (“Antimimetic, Unnatural, and Postmodern” 20). Lewis begins, in the Preface, by directly addressing his readers. He tells us he has “no intention of explaining how the correspondence which I now offer to the public fell into my hands” (ix), letting readers more easily imagine the letters from Hell are real. However, this argument is refutable because this technique is only used by Lewis in the Preface. Anyone who skips the preface and goes straight to the story or reads an edition with the original preface would not be reading an unnatural narrative by this standard.¹⁶ When placed in the lineup of previous artistic representations of demons, the subversive nature of Lewis’s witty demon, particularly in the context of a Christian comedy, is what transforms the novel into an unnatural one.¹⁷

Lewis’s demon is an amalgamation of the medieval demon, Dante’s Devil, Milton’s Satan, and Goethe’s Mephistopheles. By strategically using only certain parts of other demons, Lewis uses *Screwtape* to modify all previous representations because Lewis believes they are lacking in some way. In *Screwtape*, we have a demon who

¹⁶ Having said that, it is possible to find other instances of ontological problematization throughout *Screwtape*’s letters. For example, when referencing God, he capitalizes the “h” of He. If a real demon referenced God in a letter I doubt that he would give God, the respect that a capital H implies. Intentionally or not, in this way, Lewis lets his own voice come through *Screwtape*’s.

¹⁷ Comic and intelligent demons may have existed before *Screwtape* but primarily in secular narratives. Russell references Francois Rabelais’ *Gargantua et Pantagruel* as a play which incorporates comic demons (*Mephistopheles*, 57). Panurge is one of these and is a precursor for the witty demon.

inspires the terror of the medieval demon but with the subtlety of a lawyer, a politician, or a salesman. Lewis borrows parts of the grotesque demon from Dante and the attractive humanized demon from Milton.¹⁸ For a suave, smart, sophisticated touch Lewis uses Goethe's Mephistopheles as the final ingredient. In the original preface to *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis prepares the reader for this mixture. He tells his audience that representations of angels and demons are dangerous because they are not always recognizable as symbols.

[Representations of angels by] Dante are the best. Before his angels we sink in awe. His devils, as Ruskin rightly marked, in their rage, spite, and obscenity, are far more like what the reality must be than anything in Milton. Milton's devils, by their grandeur and high poetry, have done great harm, and his angels owe too much to Homer and Raphael. But the really pernicious image is Goethe's Mephistopheles. It is Faust, not he, who really exhibits the ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration upon self which is the mark of Hell. The humorous, civilized, sensible, adaptable Mephistopheles has helped to strengthen the illusion that evil is liberating. A little man may sometimes avoid some single error made by a great one, and I was determined that my own symbolism should at least not err in Goethe's way. (xxxv)

Few authors provide such explicit commentary on their unnatural creations. Even though this preface clarifies authorial intent, it is necessary to engage with responses to the narrative to see if the intended message is received. Stutz finds Lewis's demons much more frightening than Milton's Satan. In "No Sombre Satan" Stutz gives an apt overview of the grotesque influences on *Screwtape* and illustrates how Lewis uses him to subvert Milton's Satan. He says it is too easy to sympathize with the Satan of *Paradise Lost*. *Screwtape* reinstates the pure malice and the experience of terror as an "affective

¹⁸ Stutz traces these connections in his article "No Sombre Satan" from page 212 to 217.

component of traditional encounters with the Devil" (210). Though Stutz calls Screwtape absurd he misses the characteristic of wit in his description (225). Absurd implies incompetence and a lack of credibility while wit implies Screwtape is intelligent and entertaining. An absurd demon cannot be a threat but a witty one can. Lewis wants Screwtape to inspire a healthy fear of demons and Hell.

Lewis also does something new by adding this assembled character to a Christian comedy. The witty demon is an unnatural construction in a Christian narrative because demons, when traditionally used to convert non-Christians, were entirely fearsome. Comic demons were generally only appropriate in secular literature, often as a lampoon of the medieval stereotype. Lewis is careful not to confuse wit with farce. Screwtape tells Wormwood how to use the image of a farcical demon to their advantage: "The fact that 'devils' are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in [the human's] mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights" (32). Lewis implies that accurate representations of demons should be neither entirely fearsome nor entirely comedic. The former can be seen in many of today's horror movies. The latter is the one Lewis describes as wearing red tights. Lewis's witty demon is equal parts intelligence (implying a reason to be on guard) and comedy, allowing the audience to laugh at a demon, which Lewis believes the Devil hates.¹⁹ Importantly, laughing at the Devil is different than laughing with him. According to Oldridge, in non-religious communities the Devil "survives as a potent figure in

¹⁹ The two quotes that start *The Screwtape Letters* are from Luther who says "the best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him" and Thomas More who similarly says he "cannot endure to be mocked."

popular culture—though he no longer evokes fear among men and women for whom religion is not a central aspect of life... In neutered form, the evil one appears in advertisements and greeting cards, and provides a mascot for football teams” (90).

Unfortunately for Lewis, this means the devil in the red tights, who invites us to laugh with him, is still in action.

Though Lewis is careful to avoid creating a comedic or a sympathetic demon, he does utilize Milton’s ability to show Satan as a masterful tempter. This persona is one of the few consistencies within representations of the demonic, possibly because it is one of the few explicit examples given by the Bible. Genesis 3 relates the events that led to the fall of man. In the NIV version, Genesis 3:1 says “Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made.” The KJV version uses “subtle” rather than crafty; the MSG uses “clever”; and AMP adds “skilled in deceit” to the list. From the New Testament, Luke 4 tells the story of the temptation of Jesus, during which the Devil attempts to lure Jesus to sin. Stutz argues that Milton’s construction of Satan captures this characteristic as well as the “sometimes inexplicable attraction evil holds for humanity” (217). His evidence is the subtle way Satan approaches Eve in *Paradise Lost*. If Satan appears to humans as a monster, he will be treated as one. Fyodor Dostoyevsky provides, in fact, an example of this dangerous combination. Discussing the non-traditional devil who visits Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Kevin Corrigan characterizes him as an agreeable “has-been” (3). This witty devil is a tempter who works subtly and insidiously against the victim.

Stutz, on the other hand, succinctly focuses on the implications of a fearsome depiction of the demonic. “Craftiness,” writes the critic, “cannot succeed when fear keeps one on the defense” (217). Lewis retains this aspect of Milton’s Satan but discards any element that encourages sympathy for the Devil. Similarly, Lewis uses the suave, collected appearance of Mephistopheles without promoting a fascination with evil. In the Preface of *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis warns readers against feeling “an excessive and unhealthy interest in” devils (ix). Finally, the medieval demon is subverted because Lewis believes demons would not present themselves as outwardly fearsome creatures during a time when that image is also cartooned for pure comedic purposes. In his seventh letter to Wormwood, Screwtape explains, at least at this point in history, the best way to win souls is through slow and subtle manipulation, not outright fear. The modern age, for Lewis, is more easily convinced that devils do not exist, so the “policy” from Hell’s “High Command” is to remain hidden and work by planting distracting thoughts and encouraging extremism, tension, animosity, and pride (31-35).

Screwtape’s wit stems from Lewis’s desire to criticize hypocritical niceties and hierarchies of England in the mid-twentieth century. Screwtape’s voice is the only one we hear throughout the narrative, and this voice is usually condemning actions of his nephew, although he always signs the letters “affectionately yours” creating a mixed message of love and hate with each correspondence. Screwtape censures Wormwood for not knowing his place in the system: “That is not the sort of thing that a nephew should write to his uncle—nor a junior tempter to the under-secretary of a department” (15). The idea that there is a structure in Hell that mimics the bureaucracies on Earth is certainly

unusual, but it is the way Screwtape relates the structure that makes it antimimetic. More specifically, it is unnatural that a demon is assigned the position of under-secretary, has a nephew whom he is training in the art of soul-procurement, and delivers cleverly worded admonishment for mistakes by way of a letter. Many of these letters begin with Screwtape censuring Wormwood for his failures due to lack of experience. This is where we see Screwtape's wit surface most often.

You say you are 'delirious with joy' because the European humans have started another of their wars. I see very well what has happened to you. You are not delirious; you are only drunk... For the first time in your career you have tasted the wine which is the reward of all our labours - the anguish and bewilderment of a human soul - and it has gone to your head. I can hardly blame you. I do not expect old heads on young shoulders. (21)

In the end, Wormwood loses control over the human soul he has been trying to win for Hell and Screwtape sentences him to death. We assume Wormwood has written to Screwtape asking if his uncle's affections are genuine even after his failures as a demon, because Screwtape's response is, "My dear, my very dear, Wormwood... I think they will give you to me now; or a bit of you. Love you? Why, yes. As dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on" (171). Commenting on the newness of the idea that demons not only eat humans but also eat other demons, Stutz claims "Lewis has converted a common medieval image of punishment into the central relational principle of infernal society" (222).

Although not all his contemporaries agreed with his unnatural mode of storytelling, Lewis's reworking of past interpretations of the Biblical demon is effective

and memorable, particularly for fans of C. S. Lewis.²⁰ One way to measure this effect, even across religious boundaries, is to consider its adaptations, including an audiobook narrated by John Cleese, a 1994 Marvel comic book, and various stage versions. We can also see through Lewis's introduction to the sequel "Screwtape Proposes a Toast" that he "was often asked or advised to add to the original 'Screwtape Letters.'" Demand for a sequel and interest in adaptations show that the original fans of Screwtape had accepted this new kind of demon. Acceptance by readers is a major step toward naturalization. However, I am claiming that the witty demon is naturalized on a cultural level, even for those unfamiliar with Lewis's works through Screwtape. The fact that a Christian audience or even critics of C.S. Lewis accept Screwtape as a naturalized representation of the demonic does not necessarily show how people who are unfamiliar with Screwtape would have also begun to see the character of the witty demon as a natural one.

I would like to suggest that if Screwtape became famous enough throughout the second half of the twentieth century, all readers would have accepted the witty demon as the new standard by the time *Good Omens* was published, but that is admittedly difficult to prove. Gaiman and Pratchett make countless references to books, music, movies, and fictional and non-fictional narratives of all kinds, and never specifically mention Screwtape or Lewis; but when Screwtape and Crowley are directly compared, Crowley could be Screwtape's rebellious son. Some references in *Good Omens* are overt, as with the song "Bohemian Rhapsody" by Queen, which is one of Crowley's favorites. Some

²⁰ Lewis comments in the original preface to *The Screwtape Letters* that his novel lost the Guardian one reader. "A country clergyman wrote to the editor, withdrawing his subscription on the ground that 'much of the advice given in these letters seemed to him not only erroneous but positively diabolical'" (xxix).

are thinly veiled, as with the allusion to *Frankenstein*: “For every mad scientist who’s had a convenient thunderstorm just on the night his Great Work is finished and lying on the slab, there have been dozens who’ve sat around aimlessly under the peaceful stars while Igor clocks up overtime” (12). And some are even more subtle but still clearly attached to the original if the reader knows what to look for. This is shown, for example, in the three packages that are delivered to three of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. War receives a sword, Famine is given scales, and Pollution a crown. These symbols are taken directly from Revelation 6, but it is certainly possible that the reader would not already possess that knowledge. The three objects might seem arbitrary if the reader is not able to draw the connection. Similarly, the title of the book is a reference to one of its main sources: the 1976 film starring Gregory Peck, *The Omen*. If readers are unfamiliar with the film, they might miss its recontextualization in the title.²¹

There are some references that are not directly traceable. Gaiman and Pratchett reuse or rewrite original material without citing the source. The authors may or may not be aware of how closely their narrative recalls Lewis’s. The most obvious example is Crowley’s interaction with the bureaucratic operational structure and hierarchies of Hell which feels strikingly similar to *Screwtape*’s domain. The first time we see Crowley interact with other demons the setting is a meeting where Hastur, Ligur, and Crowley “recount the Deeds of the Day.” Hastur and Ligur, who are both Dukes of Hell, are proud to report small gains in corrupting a single soul, much as *Wormwood* would have done

²¹ If they miss that, they will certainly miss the more nuanced hints during the conversation between one of the satanic nuns and the man she believes is the chosen earthly father of the antichrist. If readers have seen *The Omen*, they will be entertained by the nun’s references to the film and her confusion at the deviation from it.

with Screwtape. When a disillusioned Crowley explains he has “tied *every* portable telephone system in Central London for forty-five minutes at lunchtime,” the response is complete silence. Hastur and Ligur are “fourteenth-century minds” who would not understand how an act that frustrates thousands of people will have a rippling effect that reaches thousands more, as humans project their frustrations onto other humans (15-17).

The two Dukes of Hell and Screwtape are both are single-minded and firmly aligned with the mission of Hell: soul acquisition. If they enjoy earthly pleasures, it is only as a bonus. We see this when Screwtape finds fault in Wormwood’s over-excitement at the start of the Second World War. “Of course war is entertaining,” he writes to his nephew. “Immediate fear and suffering of the humans is a legitimate and pleasing refreshment for our myriads of toiling workers. But what permanent good does it do us unless we make use of it for bringing souls to Our Father Below?” (22). Crowley, on the other hand, does his job of tempting humans into sin well enough, but it is clear he is more interested in how such craftiness is useful for his own entertainment rather than for the end goal of winning the spiritual war between Heaven and Hell. This implication is solidified in his decision to try to thwart the apocalypse. He wants to continue living on earth because he rather likes people even though he recognizes this as a “major failing in a demon” (33). He makes this decision because he prefers Earth to Heaven or Hell. He contemplates where he would want to live for eternity, musing that Hell is technically worse. However, he claims to remember Heaven having quite a few things in common with Hell, including not being able to get a good drink. Heaven is too boring for Crowley and Hell is too exciting (20). Earth is just right, and he sets his plan in motion by

convincing Aziraphale, an angel, that earth is home for this unnatural angel as well. I assume that if liking humans is a sign of a failing demon, colluding with an angel is a similar fault; and Screwtape would write him one nasty letter saying as much. Hastur and Ligur represent the old ways, and Screwtape would fit in with them instantly. Although I cannot claim absolutely that Gaiman and Pratchett's antiquated demons are directly influenced by Lewis's demons, Crowley's reactions to the old ways of Hastur and Ligur, who are so similar to Screwtape, provides evidence of the naturalization of Lewis's witty demon on a cultural level.

Although the authors do not state anything to this effect, there is also an interesting connection between Crowley and Milton's Satan because they both inspire sympathy. We can relate to Crowley as the employee who is more in touch with the clients than the senior members who have only retained their titles because office politics and seniority keep them there. The difference is that we are not connecting on a personal level with the powers of evil because we are sympathetic to Satan's despair after his fall from Heaven. We relate to him over a shared desire to subvert institutionalized authority. Milton's Satan is humanized, but he is still unquestionably Satan. Crowley has lived among humans so long, we can almost believe he is one.²² It is possible Gaiman and Pratchett and other antimimetic authors could tell you where the influence for these types of non-references originated, but it is also possible that they live in a sort of literary and cultural collective unconscious, a repertoire of naturalized devices ready to be

²² Similarly, we can see a connection between Mephistopheles and Crowley for they both invite the possibility that demons are not so bad. I do not see Crowley as a direct subversion to Mephistopheles because Crowley feels less politically driven. Crowley does not care so much about humanity's beliefs, as long as he gets to keep living with them.

recontextualized or rewritten. In this place, I imagine Milton's Satan is living in Dante's Inferno while Screwtape writes letters to Crowley about how to be a better demon. The devil in red tights is probably somewhere in there too.

Postmodern authors regularly pull from this collection of sources in their rewrites. In his book, *Rewriting*, Christian Moraru asks whether writers need to "acknowledge their debt plainly." Or, he wonders, is it acceptable to only hint at or even hide the connection (10)? I will start with two qualifiers to answer this question, which may very well be predominantly a rhetorical one. It is necessary to (1) admit that fiction has gray areas regarding attribution in a way that non-fiction, especially scholarly non-fiction, will not, and (2) concede that crediting the original source for every part of a narrative is impossible if the narrative aims to keep the reader in the fictional world.²³ Gaiman and Pratchett search for, use, and subvert not only previous literary representations of the spiritual realm, but seemingly random cultural ones as well, as long as they are at least marginally related to supernatural entities. Keeping in mind that fiction is different than non-fiction and attribution can break the fourth wall, I will also assert that authors have the freedom to cite their source only when they deem it necessary for their preferred aesthetics and/or audience understanding. For example, in *Good Omens*, it is impossible to imagine the reader who will pick up on every reference. In commentary after the end of the novel, Gaiman says he just wants their readers to "laugh, and maybe think" (377). One reviewer, Roger Miller, from the *Milwaukee Journal* titles his review "Here's a

²³ This is certainly the case if looking at narratives through the perspective of Derrida who claims all texts are citational.

Strange and Funny Look at Armageddon.” Miller, who admits to not understanding all the British humor, says some parts of the complex plot do not need to be overanalyzed. “Indeed,” he writes, “it spoils the fun if you attempt to follow a narrative, for whatever one there is seems to lead only to the authors’ personal heads” (np). The point is not that all readers will be able to see all the threads that string all the pieces of the narrative together. The point is that all the pieces taken from various sources fit together well enough to form the narrative in a meaningful way.

Cohesion leads to reader comprehension. However, narratives do not exist in a vacuum. Readers always relate their current text to other narratives and personal experience. The more readers understand of the separate pieces, or the building blocks of their current text, the better they can see how and why the sources are subverted. Amy Clemons speaks to this point during an examination of fidelity as a rhetorical strategy in her article “Adapting Revelation: *Good Omens* as Comic Corrective.”

... ‘fidelity’ always implies an audience familiar with and continually engaging with the original source. Examining fidelity rhetorically means examining what readers expect from a derivative text, what they know about its ‘canon,’ and how they respond to a derivative text, and then interpreting what socio-cultural shifts those imply. In fact, *Good Omens* only makes meaning in so far as it is read as an adaptation, and its meaning depends on its audience’s knowledge of and engagement with the source texts. (87)

To summarize: authors can provide readers with entertainment even if they are not familiar with the source (and I believe pure entertainment is meaningful in its own way), but deeper meaning is available if the reader knows the inspiration behind the narrative. One interpretation of this suggestion is that *Good Omens* is only useful as social

commentary to the reader who understands all sources for all references. Such a reader may be hard to find. Readers might not be able to identify the exact source for each reference, but a well-crafted narrative helps them appreciate the weight of the reference as they read. In this vein, authors themselves might not be fully cognizant of all their own influences. What I am hinting at is a situation similar to the way we use and understand phrases and clichés without knowing or caring about their original context. Because readers bring their own knowledge and experiences to the text, they might end up finding threads leading to original puzzle pieces that the author did not know were there. In my experience reading *Good Omens*, the thread was the witty demon and the original piece of the puzzle was Screwtape.²⁴

Above, I have shown how each new representation of the demonic will necessarily rely on previous depictions whether or not authors acknowledge or recognize the source. Antimimetic narratives will subvert those depictions for reasons that correspond to problems in the author's mind with his or her society. In his chapter on character in *Narrative Theory* Richardson talks about literary history as "a source of characterization" and says it is "essential [for the reader] to know the original in order to follow the later incarnation" (136). Additionally, if the reader wants a complete picture, understanding the context of the rewrite is also essential. Stutz argues that Milton's Satan was just as much a product of his time as Screwtape was a product of Lewis's (210-211).

²⁴ Whether Gaiman and Pratchett knew Screwtape, they picked up pieces of him to enhance their own narrative thus naturalizing him. Book reviewers, quoted in the beginning of *Good Omens*, found their own threads which include Thomas Pynchon, Jack Benny's *The Horn Blows at Midnight*, and Monty Python's *Flying Circus*. The New York Times calls it "a direct descendent of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*." This paper will not attempt to trace the naturalization of the above references, but it is worth mentioning that any of them could provoke their own study.

This illuminates Lewis's *Preface to Paradise Lost*, his well-known analysis of Milton's epic narrative. By understanding the past influences and the present problems of the rewriter, we will have a greater understanding of the author's intentions.

Moraru expands this idea. He discusses how postmodernism reworks one or more narratives to put "forth a critical commentary on the socio historical ambience—values, ideas, formations, cultural mythologies—within which rewriting is undertaken or within which the reworked text was produced" (xii). I believe this characterizes unnatural narratives as well as postmodern ones. Oldridge says representations of the Devil provide a particularly rich outlet for commenting on society. This potential as an outlet for skepticism "is complemented by the principle of demonic inversion, which allows writers and artists to portray anti-worlds that mirror (and undercut) the accepted values of their own cultures" (74). Along this train of thought, the witty demon has proven himself to be a particularly useful outlet within the lineup of literary demons. Mephistopheles, Screwtape, and Crowley all act as conduits for the opinions of their authors. Russell commented on this phenomenon in *Mephistopheles* during his discussion on the innovative qualities of Goethe's demon. According to Russell, Mephisto "speaks for Goethe in his ironic comments on philosophers, professors, fanatics, generals, clergymen, bureaucrats, politicians, and exploitative rulers" (161). In a convoluted way, this could be said of Screwtape and Lewis and, maybe to a lesser extent, Crowley and his creators.

When reading Screwtape's letters, the reader only needs to reverse the demon's commentary on society to understand Lewis's opinions. For example, Screwtape calls the present church an ally (5) when filled with insincere churchgoers, prompting the reader to

be wary of hypocrisy. Later in the narrative, Screwtape instructs Wormwood that patriotism and pacifism are equally useful to Hell's design, provided that the patriot or pacifist begins to think of that affiliation as his or her religion, "and the more 'religious' (on those terms) the more securely ours. I could show you a pretty cageful down here" (34-35). Lewis, through Screwtape, encourages readers to avoid extremism and not turn social movements, however honorable they may seem at the time, into religions in their own right.

Lewis uses Screwtape to test thoughts that become major themes in his non-fiction writings.²⁵ Screwtape laments the fact that Wormwood's patient is only "*merely* Christian." Screwtape advises that it is advantageous to convince Christians to align themselves with Christianity *and* something else because it distracts them from the core message and encourages factions. He provides examples such as Christianity and the New Psychology or Christianity and Vegetarianism (135), as if the two parts are equal and inseparable. Screwtape consistently urges Wormwood to find ways to distract his patient from the fundamental truths of the religion. If Screwtape is in favor of such pluralities, we can be sure Lewis is opposed. Of the many faults Lewis finds in his world, hypocrisy, extremism, and factions are three of the most commonly mentioned. I believe these three examples represent the reason Lewis writes an unnatural narrative using the witty demon as an antimimetic device. Screwtape's wit calls attention to these issues in a way that is entertaining, frightening, and thoroughly memorable.

²⁵ *Mere Christianity* was published after *The Screwtape Letters*, but Lewis had clearly begun to form the ideas needed for the former.

Similarly, *Good Omens* has plenty to say about the disturbing conditions of the late twentieth century. At the top of the list for Gaiman and Pratchett are blind adherence to religion or any organized group, discrimination against unlikely heroes, and outdated bureaucratic hierarchies.²⁶ Gaiman and Pratchett do not condemn passionate belief in religion, but they do urge readers to question the cause and its results rather than follow blindly with absolute certainty in its supposed goodness. Clemons notes that it is not just the idea of absolute certainty that warrants criticism, but also how people react to and make decisions based on assumed certainties (89). Considering what people do in the name of religion, this idea is appropriately criticized. Crowley addresses this criticism from the prologue as he causes Aziraphale, an angel, to question God's plan. Crowley, who takes the form of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, has just tempted Adam and Eve. He considers the punishment, which is a first offence, to be too great for the crime. Though he does not admit it, this causes Aziraphale to worry that Crowley might have a point. To sooth his worries, Aziraphale retorts, "you can't second-guess ineffability" (4).²⁷ Crowley's reasoning continues to weaken Aziraphale's resolve and he questions his unchecked devotion to God's ineffable plan throughout the narrative.

Because we know Crowley is not the only antimimetic device in *Good Omens*, it is logical that other antimimetic characters would need to share the weight of delivering

²⁶ These targets at which Gaiman and Pratchett take aim through Screwtape and other characters, are interwoven and theoretically affect and encourage each other. For example, blind adherence to an organized group can cause a person to discriminate against an unlikely hero. That unlikely hero could be at the bottom of the hierarchical societal structure and therefore gets passed over even if he or she is the best person for the job.

²⁷ Throughout the rest of the novel, the uselessness of "ineffability" as a catchall answer to religion's most complicated problems is mocked by Gaiman and Pratchett.

the authors' thoughts to us. One of the least logical characters in *Good Omens* is Shadwell (Witchfinder Sergeant) who runs a witch-finding operation. He longs for the past, when witches were hunted in earnest: "Shadwell had a Cause, which he followed with the full resources of his soul and his Pensioner's Concessionary Travel Pass. He believed in it. It powered him like a turbine" (165). Gaiman and Pratchett are not criticizing belief in a cause. But their use of a capital "C" in cause combined with the misguided and comedic image they create of Shadwell, means they are mocking his extreme devotion to a singular, particularly outdated system that encourages discrimination.

Outdated systems and bureaucracies are mocked by other postmodern narratives for their stubborn ignorance of the real issue. I have already mentioned the ways in which Crowley mocks the outdated hierarchies in Hell, but the implication is that old-fashioned demons do not recognize Crowley's efficiency because they do not trust his methods and refuse to acknowledge his ideas. While Gaiman and Pratchett do not literally hope for a more efficient Hell, their social commentary, satirically made through Crowley, is that the best solution is often overlooked by those in power because the powerful want to maintain authority. Gaiman and Pratchett hope to show that the solution to problems can come from any source. This is evidenced through the character who prevents the end of the world. Although several characters attempt to stop it, the apocalypse is thwarted by the most unlikely agent: the antichrist, and pre-teen, Adam.

I have given a detailed overview of the representations of demons in narrative art in the Western tradition, but I will summarize it again to show how Screwtape and

Crowley fit in contextually. The Gospel story leads early Christians to create symbolic representation of Jesus to evangelize. After Christianity is legalized, narrative art of spiritual warfare emerges in the Middle Ages and the horrifying demon is created to win converts through fear. The Reformation used a psychological demon in its narratives to show a more complex version of evil that exists in the world. Toward the end of The Reformation, John Milton introduces the humanized Satan that creates controversial responses from readers and subsequent supernatural authors. During the Enlightenment, Goethe's *Faust* is similarly influential in its representation of the demonic through Mephistopheles. For a time after that, Satan was generally only referenced indirectly. The twentieth century brought us cartoonish devils in red tights, overindulgent demonic horror narratives, and the witty demons: Screwtape and Crowley.

Writing in response to the obsession with indulgent horror films about demonic possession, Alan Olsen notes that “even the most scientific and presumably ‘objective’ minds turn to the mythic symbols of antiquity in order to make sense out of the reality of the demonic” (14). With the many representations of demons that have surfaced over thousands of years, I feel it is safe to say the real thing, if it exists, is either a conglomeration or something beyond human description. Because the nature of the supernatural is to avoid absolute certainty, “what feelings and actions do representations of demons inspire?” is perhaps a better question than “what does a demon look like?” The question of the real thing only matters in how demons are represented and how people react to those representations. Among the most recent representations, Screwtape and Crowley speak clearly for their authors. In the conclusion to *Unnatural Narratives*—

Unnatural Narratology Alber argues that it is the process of creating new frames for unfamiliar material that invites readers to question inequalities between their expectations and the realities presented by the unnatural narrative. Alber suggests, and I agree, that this process expands our current perspectives on meaning. When we ask questions, “that we would perhaps otherwise ignore,” we put ourselves in a position to consider the answers and possibly act on our findings (216-217). Antimimetic narratives are not arbitrarily unnatural, so if readers question how and why an unnatural narrative is different, it is a mark of a successful antimimetic author to provide potential answers. Ideally, for the author, the narrative is remembered for the meaningful answers pondered by readers. For Lewis, *Screwtape* speaks for sincerity and moderation. For Gaiman and Pratchett, *Crowley* speaks for tolerance and individual thought.

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THOMAS MANN'S MODERN MONSTERS: THE GOTHIC IN *DEATH IN VENICE*
AND *THE BLACK SWAN*

Remember, my love, the object we saw
That beautiful morning in June:
By a bend in the path a carcass reclined
On a bed sown with pebbles and stones;
- Charles Baudelaire, "A Carcass," *Flowers of Evil*

Gothic monsters come to life in narratives by Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, and Thomas Mann. The terrifying creatures of *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Death in Venice*, and *The Black Swan* are rooted in the earliest examples of Gothic fiction. The genre can be traced back to the end of the eighteenth century, when decay, distortion, isolation, and other Gothic conventions started appearing in novels by Anne Williams, Matthew Lewis, and other Pre-Romantic Gothic writers. Romantic authors created their Gothic beasts by applying traditional Gothic conventions to supernatural beings. Mary Shelley introduces the seminal Romantic Gothic monster in *Frankenstein*, and Stoker furthers the character type with his vampire in *Dracula*. Frankenstein's creation and Dracula are powerful and undeniable villains, at least within their respective narratives. It is, however, more difficult to name the villains in Mann's works, but features of the Gothic monster do surface throughout *Death in Venice* and *The Black Swan*, my foci in this essay. Shelley, Stoker, and Mann all form Gothic monsters by drawing attention to anatomic details such as predatory teeth, strong hands, unsettling eyes, odd skin color, as well as to cultural

features like foreignness. Shelley and Stoker both develop sensational, terrifying, and memorable creatures by assembling these Gothic characteristics to a single being, while Mann develops new strategies for inducing horror. Rather than collecting terrifying traits in one villain, Mann breaks the supernatural being into a set of aspects, which he then disperses among the modern characters and settings of *Death in Venice* and *The Black Swan*. In other words, Mann “fragments” the monsters from *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. In so doing, I will contend, the German writer demonstrates the compatibility between the Gothic and modernism.

Gothic Modernism and Contemporary Scholarship

Though modernist authors frequently use Gothic conventions, critics have not fully unpacked the rich relationship between the Gothic and modernism. Books that survey Gothic literature chart a path from barbarian Goths to postmodernism and Southern Gothic. However, most discussions of early twentieth-century Gothic narratives focus on cinematic adaptations of traditional Gothic novels; and if modern Gothic fiction is mentioned at all, it is only in passing. Furthermore, until David Punter’s 1980 *The Literature of Terror*, contributors to the study of the Gothic did not attempt to bring criticism of the genre into the twentieth century; and it is only in recent decades that scholars have studied Gothic conventions in modernist fiction. Historically, critics tended to overlook the connection between the Gothic and modernism, in part, because the former is closely associated with Romanticism. Modernists typically desired a break from Romanticism, so in turn, the Gothic becomes guilty by association. In an effort to create

truly new art, modernists at the beginning of the twentieth century avoided replicating familiar forms because this technique was popular with Romantic authors. The technique was popular with readers as well. According to Anne Williams, a major difference between Gothic fiction and modernist poetry and prose is the wide appeal of the former (795). Moreover, John Paul Riquelme argues that the mass-appeal of Gothic fiction resulted in critics' resistance to study the Gothic, particularly in connection with so-called high modernism, which at one time bore a reputation for being inaccessible ("Toward a History" 588). Innovation does not always lead to accessibility; and, in this light, modernism and the Gothic appear to be on opposite ends of the accessibility scale.

Despite perceived differences between modernism and the Gothic, Gothic conventions are flexible enough to support both Romantic and modern texts. Critics discuss this flexibility but have yet to adequately apply it to Gothic modernism. Greg Buzwell notices that Gothic fiction effectively reflects its ever-changing environment, but he only addresses the environment of Victorian England. Similarly, scholars of Gothic fiction primarily study pre-Romantic and Romantic texts, but those same scholars use language to define the Gothic that does not limit the genre to any particular era. For example, Fred Botting writes that Gothic texts are "not rational, depicting disturbances of sanity and security, from superstitious belief in ghosts and demons, displays of uncontrolled passion, violent emotion or flights of fancy to portrayals of perversion and obsession" (2). These features appear in texts by Mary Shelley and Thomas Mann, Bram Stoker and Franz Kafka, Robert Louis Stevenson and T.S. Eliot. Gothic conventions create a bridge between modern and Romantic authors because both groups of writers

include moments of passion, insanity, violence, and perversion. However, modernist writers use these moments to new ends, and, indeed, critics have recently noticed ways in which Eliot, Joyce, Fitzgerald, Beckett, and other modernists incorporate Gothic conventions in their texts. Furthermore, articles from these scholars provide a framework for understanding Mann's use of the Gothic. For example, Andrew Smith focuses his attention on impersonality and emptiness in the modernist Gothic texts. He cites the illusion to *Dracula* in "The Waste Land" to demonstrate the Gothic presence in modernism (129). This connection is meaningful, but a more comprehensive and focused study of Gothic modernism appeared in the journal *Modern Fiction Studies* in 2000. This special issue is useful as a model for studying various strands of modernist literature under the umbrella of the Gothic tradition. Riquelme offers several examples of how Gothic conventions overlap with modernism. The critic finds that anti-realism, doubling, supernatural occurrences, and madness are modern Gothic features that cross boundaries into darkness ("Toward a History" 589). In 2008, Riquelme continues his investigation of Gothic modernism by collecting essays on this topic into a book. He pursues this project because he has a sense that "exploring the Gothic tradition's relevance to canonical modernist writing would yield important revisionary thinking about modernism" (*Gothic and Modernism* vii). I continue Riquelme's project in this essay by bringing Mann's narratives into communication with Gothic scholarship.

Woolf, Eliot, and other "high"-modern authors often find their inspiration in the same boundary-crossing subjects as Gothic fiction authors, which implies that modernists did not reject the Gothic outright. More accurately, modernist writers rejected the Gothic

because of its alignment with Romanticism. Romantic Gothic writers juxtaposed Gothic images against traditionally beautiful settings. This strategy is initially shocking because it forces high and low cultures to meet, but the sensation faded for nineteenth-century readers when Romantic Gothic authors repeatedly used this technique. Therefore, modernists needed to find a way to incorporate Gothic themes without catering to the desire for a “temporary thrill” that comes from being shocked. Paul Mărgău argues that

Gothic texts were sought for the temporary thrill that they gave through the image of a normal world invaded by monsters and supernatural elements – being a kind of fiction read in the shadows, a type of literature fit only for the lowest and most lacking in dignity. (35)

In an attempt to subvert this technique, Joyce, Pound, and Eliot set out to shock readers, not with romances of heroes and villains, but with new subjects and innovative styles. Gothic fiction was associated with so-called “low” culture for its sensational and undignified subject matter. Modernist writers had no qualms about incorporating undignified subjects into their narratives. In fact, Mann’s modern Gothic monsters expose the lack of dignity in supposedly upstanding citizens.

The Romantic Gothic Monster

As one of the most adapted creatures in the history of Gothic fiction, and a ubiquitous presence in scholarship on the Gothic, Victor Frankenstein’s creation provides a useful starting point for a discussion of the Gothic monster and how Mann adapts the figure to a modernist text. The unfortunate brute is emotionally and symbolically

complex, but Shelley sacrifices nuanced symbolism for shock value. Botting writes that Shelley's creature is, at once, a political metaphor, a hero, and a villain. Botting also claims that the monster's most memorable and referenced moment is when his creator brings him to life (93-94). I agree on both counts. However, this iconic scene has not been adapted countless times for its symbolism. Instead, it is the beast's horrific appearance that is seared into our collective memory. This Gothic villain is undead, vengeful, and hideous. Shelley describes the majority of the monster's features in one passage:

His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes... his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips. (114)

Victor's reaction to his experiment is also meaningful. The scientist flees from the room in horror, disappointment, and disgust. He is made physically ill by his own creation. Shelley devotes other adjectives to the creature throughout the novel: wretched, miserable, demonic, inhuman, depraved, terrifyingly ugly, and distorted. The author compares the creature to the Devil, thunder, darkness, the grave, and vampires.

Dracula is the clear antagonist from the beginning of the narrative. The vampire is pale, cold, unnaturally strong, intelligent, old at times, and young at other times. Playing the role of the perfect host, Dracula provides all possible comforts to guests, but the protagonists cannot help but feel nauseous and afraid in the vampire's presence. Frankenstein's creation has better intentions than Dracula, but Shelley's creature is also judged immediately by characters who see his repulsive features. To exemplify this

repulsion, one could analyze the character of the blind man, within Shelley's text, who initially seems to accept that the monster is a normal person. Though he is well-spoken and logical, the undead creature disgusts other characters with his discolored skin, thin black lips, and white teeth. Similarly, Dracula has "peculiarly sharp white teeth" which "protruded over the lips" and long nails "cut to a sharp point." The lips show an "astonishing vitality in a man of his years... The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor" (22). Frankenstein's monster and Dracula both mimic humans in an attempt to join society, but their physical features are too repulsive to be entirely concealed. The two villains are not equally evil, but they are used interchangeably in a variety of contexts because their features inspire the same kind of terror.

Shelley and Stoker implement the outward features of the Gothic monster in similar ways, consequently diminishing the distinction between each creature's symbolic objectives. However, Shelley and Stoker maintain the complex symbolism of their monsters, to an extent, through the technique of fragmentation. Critics have discussed the ways in which *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* exhibit groundbreaking fragmentation techniques. Botting describes the way Shelley fragments both beast and novel: "Fragmented, assembled from bits and pieces, the novel is like the monster itself" (94). Frankenstein's creation is literally built from fragments of corpses, but we only see those pieces as a monstrous whole. Fragmentation is similarly limited in *Dracula*. The amorphous vampire is fragmented because he can shapeshift into animal forms. Dracula is also arguably fragmented because he adopts traits from the heroes, and the heroes adopt his traits in return. Hero and villain are warped mirror images of each other, but the

characters never question their own roles within the narrative. Though Stoker experiments with the technique of fragmentation, readers still easily distinguish Dracula from the protagonists. Botting and Riquelme both study *Dracula* as an early example of modernist fiction; and though the novel, as a whole, breaks new literary ground, this vampire is still part of the Romantic Gothic tradition because he functions more like Frankenstein's creature than Mann's modern monsters. That is, the two Romantic Gothic creatures are arguably more memorable than the narratives that made them famous.

Botting elucidates the complex function of Romantic Gothic monsters and offers insight into how Mann subverts this function. According to him, Gothic monsters:

fulfil a cautionary function: they make negative attributes visible in order that they can be seen for what they are and be condemned or destroyed. Aesthetically unappealing, monsters serve a useful social and regulative function distinguishing norms and values from deviant and immoral figures and practices. They give shape, moreover, to obscure fears or anxieties, or contain an amorphous and unrepresentable threat in a single image. But only as long as the boundaries separating virtue and vice, good and evil remain clearly delineated. (8-9)

Botting recognizes what it means for a writer to assemble Gothic traits in one character: the single Gothic monster is the ultimate symbol of evil. Shelley and Stoker clearly distinguish good from evil through sensational visual identifiers. Mann, on the other hand, obscures the line between good and evil by dispersing the most terrifying aspects of Frankenstein's creature and Dracula throughout *Death in Venice* and *The Black Swan*. As Botting claims, the boundaries between hero and villain must remain clear in Gothic fiction if the reader is to understand his or her appropriate role in society. Readers of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* know they should identify with and mimic the heroes – or at

least the most heroic qualities – not the villains. Readers of *The Black Swan* and *Death in Venice* do not know who to mimic because heroism and villainy are, at times, one in the same. For Shelley, Stoker, and Mann, the Gothic monster is the physical embodiment of what it means to transgress social norms, but when Mann merges the protagonist with the antagonist, it suggests that the author questions the necessity of adhering to one's social expectations. Botting asserts that Gothic monsters cross boundaries to scare readers into performing their appropriate roles. This reputation makes the Gothic monster a useful symbol for Romantics and modernists alike. However, while Romantic authors use Gothic villains as a demonstration of what not to do, Mann incorporates the traits of the Romantic Gothic monster, specifically Frankenstein's creation and Dracula, to encourage artists to break society's rules.

Mann's Fragmented Gothic Monsters

Both Frankenstein's creature and Dracula influence the monsters in *Death in Venice* and *The Black Swan*, but Mann modernizes his creatures by fragmenting them. The Gothic monsters in Mann's modern novellas resemble the grotesque, uncanny, and unsettling villains from Shelley and Stoker's novels. Particularly in *Death in Venice*, Aschenbach and his doppelgangers have unusual or threatening eyes, mouths, teeth, gums, hands, skin, clothing, mannerisms, and intentions. Mann disperses these descriptions throughout the novella, assigning traits to various characters—including the hero, Aschenbach. The Gothic monster is even more fragmented in *The Black Swan*, in which Gothic traits seem to materialize and vanish without warning. Though *The Black*

Swan and *Death in Venice* share a similar plot, the characters in *The Black Swan* do not often assume villainous roles. It is impossible to name any one character in *The Black Swan* as evil, but Nature becomes a new version of the Gothic monster. Mann does not directly assign physical features to Nature, but it is the agent of change and the harbinger of death. These similarities place Nature in the line of Gothic monsters, and understanding the trajectory of this tradition allows readers to see how Mann manipulates the role of the antagonist in the Gothic tradition. Mann uses Aschenbach's transformation into the villain to show the initial fragmentation of Frankenstein's creature and Dracula, but in *The Black Swan* the fully fragmented Gothic monster becomes entirely intangible and unstoppable.

In *Death in Venice*, Mann assigns characteristics of the Gothic monster to Aschenbach's doppelgangers and Tadzio. Aschenbach sees the first double during a walk among tombstones. The foreign man in the graveyard, meant to represent Hermes with his "straight-brimmed straw hat," is thin, and has a bald Adam's apple, colorless eyes with red lashes, and lips that curl back to reveal "glistening teeth to the gums" (5). Aschenbach compares another doppelganger to a circus director with a precariously perched hat, a cigar stump in the corner of his mouth, and bony yellow fingers (16). Aschenbach forgives, or at least rationalizes, the strange appearance of previous doppelgangers, but the hero is truly unsettled by the next doppelganger. He calls the young-old man a creature and "a truly repulsive sight" (19). His repulsion reveals his fear of becoming the old man. The dandy wears a red scarf and a wig, he is loud and seems out of place among a young crowd, his neck is shrunken and sinewy, and he sports a

“double row of yellow [false] teeth” (17). The man babbles, bows, scrapes, drools, blinks, and licks the corner of his mouth. These features disgust Aschenbach and reveal his fear of losing his dignity. The gondolier reveals the traveler’s reluctance to release control. This doppelganger, who takes Aschenbach on an unnecessarily long ride to his hotel, “had an unpleasing, even brutish face, and wore blue clothes like a sailor’s, with a yellow sash; a shapeless straw hat with the braid torn at the brim perched rakishly on his head” (21). Aschenbach is surprised by the rower’s strength and notices his lips curling back to reveal white teeth to the gums. The gondolier’s appearance should be familiar, even if the reader cannot recall why. The straw hat, precariously perched, teeth, lips, gums, and hints of yellow are all grotesque traits of Mann’s fragmented Gothic monster.

Mann uses Tazio to subvert the ways in which Gothic fiction writers traditionally incorporate grotesque themes. Rather than setting the grotesque and the beautiful as opposites, Mann creates a character who embodies both at once. Tazio, a young boy in Venice, is the object of Aschenbach’s desires. The boy initially seems anything but grotesque, and his arrival appears to interrupt Aschenbach’s encounters with the uncanny doubles. However, the boy’s classically beautiful form only holds true at a distance. Up close, Aschenbach sees Tazio’s imperfect teeth and notices how his features distort when he does not get his way. Gothic texts, according to Botting, are not beautiful, “they display no harmony or proportion,” and they are “ill-formed, obscure, ugly... register revulsion, abhorrence, fear, disgust and terror” (2). So, Tazio represents the coexistence of beauty and distortion; the boy resembles both a well-proportioned Greek statue and a grotesque Gothic gargoyle. Aschenbach is unexpectedly drawn to this

combination. Tadzio's darkened brow, curled lips, and sunken eyes, which show hatred, are all pleasing to Aschenbach. These feelings confuse and shame the traveler. He is glad to have witnessed Tadzio's passion but finds it odd that distorted beauty delights him (31). Aschenbach finds the unsettling features of the doppelgangers appealing when combined with classic beauty, but he will not fully acknowledge his discomfort because it means admitting where he has seen those features before.

One final doppelganger emerges toward the end of the novella. Mann uses the performer to bring fragments of the previous doubles together before applying all the Gothic traits to Aschenbach. The red-haired performer wears a hat that barely stays on his head. He is thin, swaggering, and his veins bulge in his swollen forehead like Frankenstein's creature. Like the gondolier and the man in the graveyard, the performer is out of place, or foreign. Dracula and Frankenstein's creature are similarly "othered." Readers will recall the young-old dandy and the ticket-man when Mann draws attention to the corner of the performer's mouth. Readers tuned into the tradition of the Gothic monster will also recognize pieces of Stoker and Shelley's beasts in the performer's sinister smile. Finally, the performer furrows his brow like Tadzio and Aschenbach when they are upset. This feature is not immediately frightening or unsettling because furrowing the brow is a universal sign of displeasure. But Mann makes it a visual signifier of the Gothic monster because Aschenbach simultaneously attaches it to someone grotesque, the performer, and someone beautiful, Tadzio. Anger distorts Tadzio's perfection and causes Aschenbach to associate a monstrous character with an

innocent one. Aschenbach appreciates the distortion in Tadzio, causing the reader to wonder whether the antihero welcomes the distorted features in the performer as well.

I have discussed how Mann fragments Frankenstein's creation and Dracula through Aschenbach, but the author also provides insight as to why a modernist would subvert the way Romantic writers use the Gothic monster. While Romantic authors make the Gothic monster synonymous with all things undesirable, Mann introduces the idea that the undesirable has aesthetic value worth exploring, no matter how high the price is for the hero. In *Death in Venice*, the price of creating beautiful art is that the hero must die as a villain. Aschenbach's transformation is unappealing, but this change allows him and the reader, by extension, to see beauty in the Gothic monster. Certainly, the Aschenbach from the beginning of the novella would not consider any aspect of the performer to be beautiful. However, by the end of the story Aschenbach exhibits most of the monstrous traits and becomes, himself, an amalgamation of the doppelgangers. Though the antihero initially resists the connections between himself and his doubles, Aschenbach finally accepts his place among the Gothic monsters.

Tadzio plays an important role in Aschenbach's decline and illustrates how far the antihero is willing to go to understand and produce beautiful art. The boy begins as an unknowing muse for Aschenbach, but Tadzio becomes a victim of the Gothic monster. Gary Johnson characterizes Tadzio as a "temptation and a perverse kind of professional challenge" (85). Once Aschenbach creates his best work of art, he overcomes the professional challenge and only the temptation remains. The images of Aschenbach as the monster begin as the antihero indulges his perverse desires. Aschenbach pursues

Tadzio with a passion like that of Frankenstein's creature and Dracula. When Tadzio is alone and moving slowly, Aschenbach wishes "to overtake him" but fails to make contact (46). As a direct result of this failed interaction, Mann calls our attention to the mouth again as Aschenbach's lips part to let in more air. In this scene, Aschenbach is a predator. Later, Aschenbach becomes a captor, and further associates himself with the Romantic Gothic monster, when he withholds information about the plague in an effort to keep Tadzio in Venice.

The narrated dream of Dionysian revelry, which heavily uses Gothic imagery, summarizes Aschenbach's transformation in the narrative. The dream is undoubtedly connected to Aschenbach's guilt over his obsession with Tadzio because Aschenbach hears the creatures in the dream yelling sounds "composed of soft consonants with a long-drawn *u*-sound at the end," like he heard Tadzio's name originally pronounced (66-67). At first, Aschenbach is a spectator of the demons, then he becomes one of them:

Yes it was he who was flinging himself upon the animals, who bit and tore and swallowed smoking gobbets of flesh...and in his very soul he tasted the bestial degradation of his fall. The unhappy man woke from this dream shattered, unhinged, powerless in the demon's grip. (67)

Stoker's depictions of Dracula are similarly terrifying in the visceral language that depicts an all-consuming beast. However, in *Dracula*, the Romantic Gothic monster manifests literally, allowing the heroes to destroy him. Mann's Dionysian beast is the clearest and most fully formed picture the author allows of the Gothic monster, but it occurs in a dream, where traditional weapons are useless. This demonstrates a kind of immortality in the modern Gothic monster. Mann confirms this new characterization

when Aschenbach tries to cover up what he has become with cosmetics. The attempts to achieve outward beauty only solidify his transformation into the doppelgangers. The barber alters his hair, skin, and lips to make him appear younger. The make-over is supposedly successful, but the effect is grotesque to the reader because Mann draws attention to the, now familiar, monstrous traits: eyes, mouth, the red neck tie, and finally the recurring straw hat (67-69). Aschenbach has fully become the monster.

In *The Black Swan*, Mann fragments the Romantic Gothic monster and disperses the fragments so thoroughly that no character ever fully becomes a villain. Instead, he uses natural occurrences to suggest Nature is the new Gothic monster. Mann does not overtly personify Nature, so it is impossible to outline traits of this Gothic monster as I have done with Frankenstein's creation, Dracula, Aschenbach, and the doppelgangers. However, Nature does work through Rosalie, the heroine, and manifests itself as a villain as she exhibits familiar Gothic traits. Nature controls Rosalie's physical changes, and she willingly submits. Nature selects Rosalie as its victim because she trusts and reveres it. In this way, the relationship between Rosalie and Nature is a distorted retelling of the traditional Gothic story of captor and captive. However, Rosalie is a new kind of captive because she enjoys the physical effects of the Gothic monster. When Rosalie exhibits traits of the creature, she feels alive, youthful, and passionate; she feels right. A similar transformation occurs in *Dracula*, as Lucy Westenra falls prey to the vampire, but Rosalie's brief transitions into the monster are subtler and more fragmented. When Lucy is conscious, she resists Dracula. Importantly, Rosalie does not resist Nature's control;

she welcomes it. The respectable Lucy is only drawn to Dracula while she sleepwalks, but Rosalie is fully awake in her forbidden longings.

The fragments of the Gothic monster are hard to find in *The Black Swan*, but Nature brings the pieces to the surface of the narrative in moments of perverse passion. The Gothic monster is visible in Rosalie when Ken Keaton arrives because he tempts her to step outside the determined social structure of acceptable love interest. At first, the young American causes Rosalie to flush violently with desire (46). Mann describes her as feverish, terrified, blissful, and ashamed. Blood rushes to her face then quickly clears, leaving her “frighteningly pale” (48). Rosalie gnashes her teeth because she is jealous of younger women who might attract Ken’s attention (51). However, once Rosalie stops trying to repress her desires, Mann draws attention to the positive, though still Gothic, aspects of Rosalie’s transformation. Rosalie’s daughter and Ken notice a seemingly supernatural change come over Rosalie. Anna tries to explain the difference: “to my eyes, at moments, and in a certain phantasmagoric fashion, it has been as if suddenly, out of your dear matronly self, stepped the Mama of twenty years ago” (76). She appears to be getting younger. Similarly, Dracula has the power to regain youth when he sucks his victims’ blood. Rosalie’s passion for Ken can hardly be compared to Dracula’s insatiable desire to siphon away life from women and children, but both characters renew their youth by indulging an interest in forbidden desires. Ruth Helyer claims that “the Gothic novel celebrates unacceptable behavior, the violent, the self-promoting, and those who indulge their cravings” (744). This may be true on a subconscious level in *Dracula*, but Helyer’s argument is realized fully and openly through Rosalie.

The heroes in Romantic novels are unable to confront the Gothic with acceptance, so they blame the monster when any protagonist dies. The heroine of *The Black Swan* is different. Rosalie believes that Nature renewed her youth so that she could pursue a relationship with Ken, despite society's sure disapproval. The change in her body is, in fact, due to a massive tumor. Mann makes Nature the villain, but Rosalie never blames Nature for the unfortunate diagnosis she receives from the doctor. Before she knows she is going to die, Rosalie's body starts to deteriorate, and she turns to cosmetics to cover the weight-loss and the "ominous, tired-looking blueness under her eyes" (112). The rouge "created no very effective illusion against the yellowish pallor of her complexion" (113). As her predecessor Aschenbach proved, this unnatural attempt to reverse Nature's control is futile. Rosalie and Aschenbach are revolting when they try to thwart Nature's effects, but when Mann's heroes relinquish control, death and decay have the potential to become beautiful.

Throughout *The Black Swan*, Mann uses Rosalie to demonstrate how acceptance of the Gothic monster leads to a new understanding of beauty. Early in the novella, Mann reveals Rosalie's proclivity for a wide range of natural smells: "sweetness, aromatic bitterness, even heady and oppressive scents—she loved beyond measure, and absorbed it deeply, thankfully, with the most sensual fervor" (19). Nature blends sweet with bitter and lightness with oppression. Rosalie, like Aschenbach when he sees Tadzio up close, finds pleasure in beauty that is naturally distorted. Rosalie's final words to Anna show her unwavering devotion to Nature, even though it seems to have deceived her. "Nature—I have always loved her, and she—has been loving to her child" (141). With

this bit of dialogue, Mann reverses the parent-child relationship in *Frankenstein* – in which Victor is the father figure – to demonstrate Rosalie’s complete submission to the Gothic monster. The heroes in *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and even Aschenbach do not exhibit such acceptance of the Gothic monster. Victor Frankenstein dies with a vengeful heart in pursuit of his creation. Death is tragic and gruesome in *Dracula*, but the heroes agree it is better than becoming a vampire. Aschenbach seems to surrender control and he dies peacefully, but he still dreams of the beautiful Tadzio rather than any of the distorted doppelgangers.

Mann’s Gothic Settings

Traditionally, Gothic narratives take place in decaying buildings that were once grand, such as ruined castles or mansions. Ruth Helyer claims that these spaces are metaphors for “the darkness of the mental realities presented within these founding texts” (726). She goes on to say that these “surface aesthetics of settings and characters” reveal something of their “inner capacities.” In other words, the setting and its inhabitants, including the monster, speak in tandem to say something deeper than what the sensational qualities of the popular novels might immediately suggest to the reader. In *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, the supernatural beings thrive in unpopulated areas and dark spaces. If the space is not dark and ominous enough, some monsters intensify the setting by manipulating weather. For example, Dracula brings storms and fog with him to England. This supernatural ability is an effective way for the villain to instill fear in his fictional

victims and real readers. Stoker relieves those anxieties by the end of the novel by killing the vampire.

The Gothic monster is most effective as a metaphor for social anxieties when readers engage the creature in its original setting. Shelley and Stoker use Romantic Gothic settings to reinforce the symbolism of Frankenstein's creation and Dracula. The ominous setting continuously reminds the reader that the villain is present and active. Shelley's Gothic monster roams the hills and mountains, and it interrupts Victor's attempt to restore his spirits. Vijay Mishra suggests that sentimental heroes, such as Victor, "seek the refuge of the pastoral whenever they are in trouble" (89). However, the hero cannot seek refuge in the hills if the foe is already there. The historical context of *Frankenstein* illuminates the role of Shelley's Gothic monster as a symbol. Factories, machines, and the all-consuming pursuit of knowledge began invading peaceful towns during the Industrial Revolution. Victor cannot escape his creation, just as Shelley and her contemporaries felt they could not escape the invasion of technology and progress. By the end of the nineteenth century, and the decline of British imperialism, readers worried about a different kind of invasion. Dracula symbolizes the fear of reverse colonization, or the invasion of the other. This monster comes to England from the East bringing storms, death, and infection of the blood. Shelley and Stoker both expose a general fear of change, particularly change at the expense of national identity and English tradition. Both authors use traditional Gothic settings to represent this conservative desire for an idealized past.

Gothic fiction scholars have made many connections between Romantic monsters and their fictional habitats, and this scholarship provides a useful way of analyzing modern Gothic creatures and their settings. Shelley and Stoker design fitting spaces for their supernatural beings, just as Mann's fragmented settings are appropriate spaces for fragmented monsters. When Romantic authors create a Gothic setting, the fictional world is consistently Gothic. But, Mann makes abrupt shifts in his novellas from Gothic to classic to modern, sometimes overlapping aspects of each. In *Death in Venice*, sometimes the Gothic conventions interrupt classic beauty. Mann Gothicizes classic art through his distorted description of Tadzio's perfection—and the emerging modernist in Aschenbach enjoys this grotesque beauty. At other times, modernist conventions interrupt the familiar trajectory of Gothic fiction. The modern Gothic doppelgangers seem to enter Aschenbach's world with warnings from the Gothic setting. In a Romantic Gothic narrative, the heroes would capitalize on these warnings to predict the creature's movements and use the information to destroy evil. Instead, the Gothic features begin to delight Aschenbach.

In *The Black Swan*, Mann provides little warning in the setting that the Gothic monster is approaching. This change is evidence of further fragmentation of Romantic Gothic features because there is no way to predict when the Gothic will arrive. The reader will recognize the first Gothic setting in *The Black Swan* as Rosalie and her daughter come upon the carcass, but this event occurs well into the narrative and the only warning is the musky smell of death. Later in the novella, Rosalie declares her love for Ken in a hidden passage of a castle, which is a typical Gothic setting. However, the Gothic setting

disappears—as abruptly as it appears—when Mann describes Rosalie’s tumor. This clinical evaluation by Muthesius is devoid of sentimentality. Muthesius has a double chin, red complexion, “and water-blue eyes into which tears came easily—their presence having nothing whatever to do with the state of his emotions” (137). The Gothic apparently does not exist in modern German examination rooms. The doctor, who has access to modern medicine, is an enemy to natural death. Rosalie and Aschenbach attempt to mask death with make-up; they fight the Gothic monster, Nature, but their weapons are useless. Because the Gothic setting disappears when the doctor arrives, Mann suggests that modern medicine is more of a threat to Nature than cosmetics. Of course, Rosalie’s condition has progressed too far; Muthesius, in this case, does not have the power to stop Nature.

As he does with other visual identifiers, Mann fragments the Gothic monster throughout a modern setting. In *Death in Venice*, the author turns Venice into a haunted tourist trap for Aschenbach by employing Gothic conventions of captivity and isolation. Carnivals, casinos, and other pleasure destinations are designed to lure people into supposed bliss. This version of Venice feels more like a descent to Hell than a vacation spot, particularly when the disease begins to spread. Clayton Koelb discusses this imprisoning effect, noting that Aschenbach arrives in Venice relatively easily, but getting out seems impossible (100). Once the traveler departs for Venice, the other characters all seem to be in league against him. This isolation unsettles the solitary traveler and, to return to the casino metaphor, gives the impression that the house always wins. To keep people captive, carnivals exploit addictions and distract attendees from reality. Mann

exploits Aschenbach's addiction to Tadzio through the doppelgangers. The doppelgangers regularly distract the traveler with showmanship and outright lies about the imminent plague in the city. If Aschenbach could ignore his desire for Tadzio, he might also be able to see death approaching.

Understanding Mann's Monsters

As I have already observed, the Gothic monster traditionally represents what is wrong with society. In *Death in Venice* and *The Black Swan*, Mann does not include a clear villain, so the reader must find the cause of decadence by assembling pieces of the fragmented monsters. Mann increases the challenge of assembling the villain by making it hard to distinguish reality from imagination. At the beginning of *Death in Venice*, Aschenbach rationalizes the mysterious encounters with his uncanny doubles because he is not ready to see them as distorted versions of himself; he is certainly not ready to see the beauty in that distortion. Aschenbach accepts what seems like a menacing stare from the stranger in the graveyard as a result of his own "inquisitive and tactless" gaze (5). Mann introduces the ticket-man and the hunchbacked sailor as if they work for a dying circus. After Aschenbach buys his ticket, the doppelganger calls for the next customer, though there is no one else in line. This action gives the reader the impression that the man is an automaton, but Aschenbach makes no comment and Mann offers no insight into Aschenbach's reaction. Koelb notes that "none of these ominous portents deters the eager traveler in the slightest" (100). The young-old man is the first doppelganger that seems to unsettle Aschenbach. Though Aschenbach admits being disgusted by the old

dandy, he still rationalizes his own reaction to the experience by noting that the rest of the man's party seemed "used to him" (17). These rationalizations present the reader with mixed messages about the reliability of the narrator and distract from a complete understanding of the doppelgangers.

Mann does not make it easy for readers to assemble his modern monsters, but an understanding of Gothic conventions allows readers to orient themselves in *Death in Venice* and *The Black Swan*. Readers who are tuned in to the Gothic tradition can use the Gothic as a signpost for the modern monster. Even if readers cannot initially assemble the fragments of the creature, they will get a sense that the Gothic is at work. Putrid smells, uncanny strangers, discolored skin, and other Gothic features make appearances when Mann incorporates pieces of the beast into his narratives. Knowledge of Gothic conventions helps readers find the fragments of the modern monster and understand the monster's function. In this way, Gothic conventions are used to facilitate the meaning-making process. Regardless of how thoroughly Mann fragments Frankenstein's creation and Dracula, and despite the rationalizations from Aschenbach, Gothic features in character and setting point to the presence of the monster and what it represents. For example, Mann's modern monsters may represent different fears in different readers, but Aschenbach and Rosalie encourage readers to question the social norms that prevent the creation of beautiful art. In *Death in Venice*, Aschenbach's perverse desire for Tadzio is objectively repulsive, but Mann would have readers believe that Aschenbach created objectively beautiful art as a result of the inappropriate obsession. In *The Black Swan*, Rosalie's obsession is mildly inappropriate in comparison, but the message from Mann is

similar. Through Aschenbach and Rosalie, Mann argues that going against the wishes and expectations of social conventions elicits passion, and *that* passion produces true and lasting beauty.

Adapting Gothic Monsters

As many scholars have shown, Frankenstein's creation and Dracula are symbols for complex issues, but the Romantic Gothic monster is so sensational that the monster, itself, becomes the thing that is remembered and reused rather than the complex issues that it symbolizes. Riquelme demonstrates that the Gothic has long been used as a subversive tool when he writes, "the critical questioning of cultural attitudes often proceed within a Gothic structuring of elements or with a Gothic inflection" ("Toward a History" 589). If this is true, then writers who reuse the Gothic monster necessarily distort the original intent. When the Gothic monster is reduced to a mascot, it is impossible to connect the symbol to the social taboos of the time. Additionally, without a Gothic setting, the critical questioning of cultural attitudes fades. In fact, Romantic Gothic monsters only thrive because they exist in a fallen society. Writers who remove the beast from such decadent backdrops turn the symbolic Gothic monster into an instrument of horror rather than a form of social and cultural critique. Chris Baldick recognizes the simplification of Frankenstein's creature with each new adaptation, and works to correct misunderstandings that result from the narrowed view of the Gothic monster. Though there are elements, particularly visual identifiers, of Frankenstein's creature that remain intact from one adaptation to the next, the creature's complexity

tends to lessen. There are exceptions to this theory. The first film versions of Frankenstein and Dracula maintained the complex symbolism of the monsters and broke new ground in cinema and visual Gothic representations. In general, however, instead of symbolizing historically relevant fears and anxieties, Frankenstein is now a monster that symbolizes all monsters. Popular culture exemplifies this diminishment. In honor of the 200th anniversary of Shelley's novel, a recent issue of *Life* magazine features Frankenstein, the creature, on the cover with the subtitle: "The Man, The Monster, The Legacy." The picture is of Boris Karloff in his portrayal of the creature; Dracula makes an appearance or two in the issue because film adaptations popularized the image of the two creatures as equals. It is unsurprising that modern Gothic monsters are not represented in this survey. Perhaps in another one hundred years, scholars will discuss Mann's modern monsters alongside Frankenstein's creation and Dracula. Mann's villains are, however, too fragmented ever to appear on the cover of *Life*.

Physical traits from *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* set the precedent for what monsters look like, so they are easily and often reused in a wide range of genres. Sensational descriptions of unusual strength, white teeth and curling lips, long fingers, bulging veins, discolored skin, and generally distorted features lend themselves particularly well to film. Their fame caused the villains to quickly achieve mythical status. According to Baldick, the two antagonists became modern myths because *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* were so widely read (2). The critic describes the power of mythical creatures to maintain name recognition regardless of how they are rewritten into new settings. However, Baldick also notes the tendency of adaptations to "constrain their

further development into fixed channels” (4). This appears to be an inherent drawback to becoming a myth. Certain horror films, sitcoms, and children’s cartoons irreversibly fix Frankenstein’s creature and Dracula into a stereotype of their original selves. The monsters are so recognizable that they eventually exist outside any references to their original context. As an extreme example of this trajectory, consider the transformation and diminishment of Count Dracula into Count Chocula of the breakfast cereal.

Romantic Gothic monsters are instantly recognizable in any adaptation because their physical Gothic features and villainous traits are all focused in one character, but Mann’s use of fragmentation keeps the Gothic monster attached to its particular modern Gothic setting – and thus retains its symbolic potency. Regardless of their new settings, in subsequent adaptations, Frankenstein’s creature and Dracula remain remarkably close to Shelley and Stoker’s original physical descriptions. To test this theory, one could ask a crowd of people to draw a picture of Frankenstein’s monster and Dracula, and the drawings would probably be fairly consistent. Mann, on the other hand, creates a fluid, hard-to-pin-down monster, one that is everywhere and nowhere at once. Sometimes he brings pieces of the Gothic monster into modern settings, and sometimes those traces are completely abandoned in the modern world. Some adaptations of Mann’s novellas might focus on the teeth and the yellow eyes, while others will recall the discolored skin and the unusual amounts of blood. As a result, Mann’s Gothic monsters cannot leave a collective image in the minds of readers because each reader would prioritize certain Gothic features over others. For example, the 1971 film adaptation of *Death in Venice* seems to focus on the pale skin and unsettling smiles of the doppelgangers. However, if the

monster is not collectively recognizable by the public, it cannot be reused by its appearance alone. In other words, Mann's monsters are only recognizable as monsters within *The Black Swan* and *Death in Venice*.

Conclusion

Mann illustrates a shift toward the modernist tradition by fragmenting the Romantic Gothic monster. In *Death in Venice*, pieces of the beast exist in Aschenbach's doppelgangers, but it is impossible to tell whether the antihero's doubles are real or imagined. Mann also hides aspects of the creature in the setting. A Gothicized version of Venice distracts Aschenbach and the audience from forming a unified vision of the modern Gothic monster. In *The Black Swan*, the monster is fragmented throughout the setting and concealed in Nature. Nature is a killer and a captor, both of which are trademarks of any Gothic antagonist. This intangible Gothic monster reveals itself through Rosalie, but Mann's heroine is no villain. The intangibility of the modern Gothic monster makes it impossible to gain a decisive victory over evil. Rosalie's death does not weaken the power of Nature. Even if one manifestation of the creature dies, readers will understand that it cannot be completely defeated. If the antagonist cannot die, modernists like Mann imply that the protagonist must know what to expect from it and meet it with courage. It takes courage to face the metaphorical monster because it is difficult to go against the norm. For Mann, the result of this bravery and the primary benefit of transgression is new and beautiful art.

Mann's villains demonstrate one of the major differences between Romantic Gothic and modern Gothic fiction: Romantic writers use the Gothic monster to urge caution against indulgence, while modernist writers suggest possible benefits in satisfying the desire to break the rules. In *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, the heroes kill their respective supernatural beasts and, ostensibly, prevent further social decadence. Like Frankenstein's creature and Dracula, Mann's modern Gothic monsters still represent the fears of contemporary readers, but Mann engages with those fears by turning the heroes into the beasts. Aschenbach and Rosalie cannot be considered typical villains, but they break society's rules and consequently display traits of Romantic Gothic creatures. In this way, Mann distorts Romantic binaries of clear heroes and villains, winners and losers, or any absolute distinction between good and evil.

In terms of accessibility, modernist and Gothic conventions have traditionally been viewed as opposites. However, while Mann has modernist aims, his use of the Gothic also assists readers in making meaning. Mann's texts reveal an important result of fragmenting recognizable Romantic Gothic monsters: familiar Gothic conventions orient the reader within the fragmented modern novel. Gothic features act as signposts, pointing the reader to the pieces of the Romantic Gothic monster. Another result of fragmenting the Romantic Gothic monster is that Mann's monsters are forever connected to their original narrative. Mann's creatures are inextricably woven into a range of characters and settings, making it difficult to picture the monster in any other context. In their original settings, Frankenstein's creation and Dracula effectively represent the anxieties of contemporary readers. However, these two characters often lose their complex symbolic

power when they are removed from the worlds created specifically for them. Artists easily adapt Frankenstein's creature and Dracula into new narratives because readers have a clear picture of these Romantic Gothic monsters. However, it is impossible to reduce Mann's modern Gothic monster to a collectively recognizable image because readers will assemble the fragments differently. If every reader creates a unique version of the modern Gothic monster, that monster cannot be effectively reused. Fragmentation paradoxically keeps the modern monster firmly situated in the original narrative, thus allowing him to maintain his symbolic power. Ideally, scholars will continue inspecting the various ways in which modernists use, subvert, and honor Gothic conventions. The ultimate goal in pursuing this trend is to consider Gothic modernist narratives alongside Romantic Gothic predecessors as equally significant to the Gothic tradition.

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